The Leading Human Factors Deficiencies in Unmanned Aircraft Systems

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Scott Howe
Research Test Pilot
NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center

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Scope of Discussion

• **What:** Explore the top human factors deficiencies in unmanned aircraft systems *from a user’s perspective*
• **Why?** To educate/encourage UAS designers & testers on:
  – the importance of “good design” for increased safety and mission success (no matter how that’s defined by the operator/user).

**Today’s Roadmap:**

• Why do you care?
• Background (“The Problem”)
• Top Human Factors Deficiencies
• Conclusions/Takeaways

“I'm a lot more interested in people than I used to be. I used to be most interested in abstract ideas, and people were an afterthought, but that's changed a bit.” -- Malcolm Gladwell
Because Good Human Factors means...

** Less user errors due to interface confusion, info overload, poor ergonomics & interface, automation confusion

Which translates into...

- **Increases** likelihood of “mission” success
  - Reliable & capable of getting from A to B; & accomplish tasks within desired parameters
- **Enables** safe integration into the National Airspace
  - Protect lives & property; build/maintain public confidence & trust in UASs
- **Your UAS’s success = future “mission” opportunities**
  - FAA trusts it; public accepts it; customer wants more

Is this relevant today?

- Yes → rapid growth of UAS sales, use, and certification.
Background / Perspective

• **Me:** 4,100 hrs flight time (*USAF operational; test; NASA*)
  • 1800 hrs Manned Flying (900+ hrs F-15C/D)
  • 2300 hrs Unmanned Flying (*MQ-1, MQ-9, RQ-4, X-56*)
  • Flying unmanned aircraft since 2002

• **Survey:** Small sample of current military operators, testers, & former UAS manufacturer pilots
  – Slanted towards med-to-large UAS’s with cockpit/console style ground control stations (*GCSs*)
  – Applies to any UAS with some autonomy **and** a pilot.
What is Human Factors (HF) & Human-Machine Interaction/Interface (HMI)?

- HF (FAA) – multidisciplinary study of human capabilities and limitations...
- ...applied to equipment, systems, facilities, procedures, jobs, environments, training, staffing, and personnel management...
- for safe, comfortable, and effective human performance
- HMI – “doing” requires interaction (human & hardware)
  - The Interface: the interactive surface of that hardware

"The Problem" = Rapid development of the machine ... Forgetting the operator in the design ... Over-reliance on automation
Automation & Complex Modern Cockpit displays:

- **Pros** -- Safety: decrease stress/fatigue; increase thinking/monitoring; reduce human error

- **Cons**
  - False security (overreliance); Insecurity during failures (what’s it doing?); Critical info missed (Fixation on peripheral info)
  - Increased reaction time when out of the loop (should I intervene?); Complacency; Confusing info during failures
UAS Design:

- **Areas of Concern** *(from FAA, Test Community, etc)*
  - Human-automation interaction *(trust; mode awareness; disengagement behavior)*;
  - Pilot-centric GCS design *(displays; sensory deficit)*;
  - Traffic information *(separation assurance)*;
  - Contingency management *(lost link status)*;
  - Disengagement Behavior;
  - General over-reliance on automation

Now – on to the specific deficiencies......
Top UAS Human Factors Deficiencies

Overview

1. Lack of a design standard (ground station HMI)
2. Inadequate command interfaces in "highly-autonomous" UASs
3. Limitations to See & Avoid capability (& visual nav & recognition)
4. Lack of seat-of-the-pants & audio sensory cues
5. Lack of depth perception (for landing or other proximity-critical tasks)
• Historically, aircraft were/are required to conform to industry standard aviation HMI design elements (sticks, yokes, throttles, flight instruments, heads up displays, seats, visibility (out the window)).

• UASs came on the scene – many manufacturers; no rules

• We can't dive into this one without first talking about the basics of Human Factors in Design...
Cockpit design (ergonomics, anthropometrics, information) is important for all sorts of HF reasons:

- **Fatigue** – “mission tasks” and duration should drive design & layout of control station
  - display monitors and graphics design template and environmental lighting (eye fatigue)
  - physical layout and reach considerations
  - seat comfort/adjustability
  - environmental controls (temp)
- **Audio/Aural** – good audio enables good communication
  - selectable feeds; adjustable
Importance of Cockpit Design (cont.)

• **Visual** – many aspects
  – Camera FOV; refresh rate of video link & flight parameters
  – Limited bandwidth - determining critical high-rate parameters vs non critical low-sample data
  – Contrast/color/design scheme of buttons and symbols and switches (software and hardware)
  – Location of critical vs. non critical info (central 30 deg critical visual cone vs peripheral areas); design-eye height of horizon line in plane with pilot's eye (assumes vertical adjustment of seat or displays).
  – **Latency** (delay between input and desired output); due to processing, signal path, servo speed – Large latency leads to PIO (pilot induced oscillation)

• **Anthropometrics** - accessible to a range of physical body types based on intended pool of pilots
• **Cognitive** - info in the right places, understandable, actionable
  – Standard units? Useful scale? Presentation of values (dials, tapes, raw numbers, bars/sliders; how many?; groupings; density; location/arrangement).
  – Buttons/switches **organized** by a familiar (aviation) scheme
    • By context? (Landing checklist; Lost-Link Emergency)
    • By system? (Fuel, Electrical, Link, Navigation, etc)
  – Avoid information overload (too many parameters)
    • Key info - easy to locate; top layer (not buried)
    • Intelligently bring up the right info at the right time
“Information Overload” ... Uniqueness = Unfamiliarity

- Typical manned pilot - trained in traditional aircraft (FAA-certified standard inceptors, gages, flight displays)
- Unique UAS GCS designs seem foreign... require experience/much practice to gain safe proficiency.

- Displayed info should simple, without diluting/sacrificing key decision-making info: aircraft state, change (rate of change), command/feedback, environment/surroundings, emergency interfaces.
Emergencies

- Upon detection, emergency info should be prioritized, highlighted, and displayed
- Only essential info to understand the problem and resolve the emergency (buttons/dialogues)
- Include airspace awareness to get to safe landing site.
- Critical “emergency-only” switches should normally be “guarded” with 2-step actuation, but quickly/intelligently accessible.
- Increases pilot's capacity to respond to the EP

Pilot involvement in design is critical for it to be relevant & effective.

Now, on to the list…
1. Lack of a Design Standard (GCS)

- FAA airworthiness certification standards (UAS) lag the rapid growth and arrival of UAS into the NAS structure...

- Wide range of GCS designs, from various designers (some with little aviation experience; or failing to involve aviators in the design process)... resulting in designs shaped by:
  - Incorrect/underdeveloped mission requirements
  - Marketing novelty
  - Rough edges of very new Tech
  - Misapplied manned cockpit traditions
  - Divergence from aviation standards (video game/smartphone)
  - Detrimental modifications (hasty/no pilot involvement)
1. Lack of a Design Standard (cont.)

• **Impact** = huge variety in interface configs and very non-standard flight control inceptors.

• **Consequence of non-standard, poor HMI:** pilot confusion, fatigue, errors, damage/loss of UAS.
  – Pilot misperceives UAS’s status in emergency...
  – Maybe critical info is not currently in view... *ie.* “Battery - Low! Land within 5 minutes!”
  – Misprioritizes actions, incorrectly responds to emergency ... leads to unexpected vehicle behavior, & maybe loss of mission, airspace violation, or damage / loss of vehicle.
2. Inadequate Command Interfaces

- (Particularly for "Highly autonomous" UAS)
  - "Highly" (not fully): operator has command of only higher levels of automation (*autopilot commands; mission routing; transponder; radio*)

- **Poor Interface(s) - Can lead to pilot input errors & unintended aircraft responses.**

- **GCS Configurations**
  - Commonly configured w/ stick & throttle; sometimes also keyboard/mouse
  - Highly-autonomous UAS may only have keyboard/mouse since automation does not require pilot inputs to pitch/roll/yaw/throttle (i.e. RQ-4)
2. Inadequate Command Interfaces (cont.)

• **Highly Autonomous UAS HMI**
  – Programmed with many autonomous outcome decision trees; (pilot more of a mission manager than operator)
  – Interface - Commands entered into dialogue boxes/sliders/etc, via mouse/keys/touchscreen - *altitude*, *orbit/loiter mode*, *airspeed*, *heading override*, etc.

• **Problem with simple text entry is two-fold**:
  – Text entry fields can look identical (critical vs routine).
    • Highlight and/or “Guard” (2-step) critical inputs (prevent accidental activation).
  – No tactile interface with a text box; Place cursor in the proper field; Eyes jump from keyboard to text field (and back) to verify entry; opportunity for errors!
    • A knob may have 3 discrete positions (entries)... a text field may have 100s of possibilities.
3. Limitations to See & Avoid Capability

• (includes navigation and feature recognition)
• Due to video technology limitations (cost, bandwidth, size), remote pilots’ eye receives less visual information than the airborne pilot's human eye.
  – Lack of Depth perception (mono-vision)
  – Limited in higher contrast settings (sunrise, sunset, sun/lights in camera FOV); Low light environments.
  – Wide FOV vs human peripheral vision, & Zoomed FOV vs human focal vision; Auto-focus
  – Bandwidth / framerate / latency / (cost)
  – Video quality dependent on data link quality
    • Graceful degradation vs. sudden loss
  – Resolution / Acuity - as displayed in GCS
  – Tracking - human eye capability coupled with head motion (fast, precise, integral, stable, always ON).
3. Limitations to See & Avoid (cont.)

— UAS Advantages: Zoom, multispectral (IR), image processing (de-haze), info overlay (lat/long, elevation, shape recognition, other aircraft location)… *multiple cameras*

  • **Less info = difficulty noticing:** traffic, weather changes, distant landing airfields, small terrain references, obstructions on the runway/taxiway, or things obscured by the sun.

— Cameras
  
  • **FOV Trade off:** Zoomed detail vs. peripheral info vs. “displayed” FOV (i.e. wrap-around monitors)
  
  • Fixed (landing) camera: stable/known
    
    – aligned with aircraft's flightpath
  
  • Slewable camera: find, track targets, clear the way
4. Lack of Sensory Cues

• Specifically, Seat-of-the-pants & Audio cues
• Lack of cues limits pilot's ability to easily/immediately understand the aircraft's state or changing state(s).
• SOTP + Audio are 2 significant senses missing from UAS flying
  – Engine vibration (normal/abnormal)
  – Engine noise changes
  – G-force changes (turns/vertical maneuvers; turbulence; aircraft configuration changes--flaps, CG shift, etc)
  – Airframe vibrations/oscillations (flutter; mech failures)
• Requires “replacement” cues: other sensing & cueing relayed or synthesized to the GCS pilot
  – Can be real (relayed) or synthetic (simulated) stimuli
    • *Aircraft sensors*: Engine noise (rpm); wind noise (high airspeed); rumbling/buffeting (near stall speed)
Lack of Sensory Cues (cont.)

– Adequate sensory “feed” vs. available link bandwidth
– Cues must be intuitive, low-latency, and distinguishable even under higher pilot workload
  • Visual displays, heads-up cues, audio, seat-rumble, stick shaker, other physical cueing)
– More is not always better (saturation) – *Balance!*
  • Don’t overuse Visual: Lights, symbols, gages & numbers
  • Audio considerations: freq; warble; pulse; repetition; pattern; variation (approaching limits); or even voice.
    – Bad: too many; not intuitive; emergency similar to normal tones; voice not clear
  • Seat "knocker" (gear/touchdown)
  • Stick shaker (command received; approaching limit)
  • Less critical cues - able to be silenced/decluttered
  • Tolerable/comfortable for duration of the mission
5. Lack of Depth Perception

- (for landing or other proximity-critical tasks)
- **Landing is more challenging without depth perception (stereo vision)**
  
  - Inaccurate height estimation for touchdown (ground-rush)... causes inconsistent timing of landing flare maneuver
    
    - Manned landing *relies* on the senses -- a memorized, repeatable 3D "sight picture" of runway shape, distance, location in windshield, & closure rate; **plus** G-forces, engine vibration, wind noise, & stick/throttle position
  
  - GCS pilot needs these translated into useful cues!
    
    - When to start the flare; How much to correct?
    
    - Replacement Cues - Laser Altimeter; Heads-up symbology; speed/throttle position aids; Rate of descent cues (symbols, tones)
5. Lack of Depth Perception

– Depth perception is critical for ground operations too!
  • Landing roll – Speed vs. required braking vs. runway remaining (critical for larger/heavier UAS)
  • Taxi, turns, identifying taxiway/crossings/parking spot
  • Obstacles - light poles, fences, overhangs, gates, powerlines – requires “replacement” mitigation (i.e. distance cues; proximity/closure rate; HD video; obstacle/shape recognition; line-following guidance).

– Ultimately lack of depth perception is “less info”
  • Results in delayed pilot decisions & inputs.
Conclusion/Recommendations

• Instead of burying important data or switches ... Make an intuitive, easy to navigate operator menu hierarchy
• Instead of wasting valuable hardware/screen real estate with unneeded data ... Organize & prioritize important info/switches, to be accessible without hiding important info... smart/intuitive.
• Instead of pilot's video being an afterthought, pursue quality new technologies (video and bandwidth) that are mission-enhancing
• Don't underestimate the "missing" senses; consider ways to incorporate other sensory cues in the design
• Don't underestimate importance of safety surrounding takeoff & landing phases; design for it, & incorporate pilot design inputs.
• Pursue further info/education on standard (best) design practices (source material for design guidelines)
• Instead of overreliance on autonomy and making design for Highly autonomous UAS GCSs an afterthought, use intuitive Command Input means (displays, buttons, layouts) & ensure special critical buttons are guarded.
• To compensate for challenges with video and monovision,
  – use new/reliable tech such as stereovision
  – miniaturized ultra HD video
  – automated modes for finding/tracking traffic or points of interest (360° camera; head-tracking device; etc.)
  – Develop depth-perception aids - stereoscopic vision, sensors, displays with enhanced cues & heads up info.

**Success Criteria?**
  – **Video Goal** = No measurable difference between the system and a pilot's eye while conducting relevant flight tasks.
  – **Overall Goal** = UAS should be equal or better at conducting the mission than a manned aircraft ........*Obtainable?*
   ........*Obtainable!*
Summary - Takeaways

• Making it intuitive... means *anticipating* what the user will think, need, & do in any situation
  – Know the Mission – team together (engineers, designers, pilots) to understand what/how to accomplish the mission.
  – Rely on industry standards/styles, new tech, common (best) design practices... to design the UAS & GCS around a well-thought out set of mission requirements.

• **BE CREATIVE!** *AND IMPLEMENT IT THE RIGHT WAY*
Suggested Reading:

- Role of Human Factors in the FAA (FAA)
- Human Factors Considerations in the Design and Evaluation of Flight Deck Displays and Controls (FAA)
- Human Factors Design Guidelines for Multifunction Displays (FAA, 2001)
- Integration of Civil UAS in the NAS Roadmap (FAA, 2013)
- FAA Human Factors Policy (Order 9550.8)
- FAR Part 23 & Part 25 – Airworthiness Standards; Subpart F